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Needs Analysis: Chinese as a Foreign Language Learners

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*Self-introduction—Xiao Wu*

I was born and raised in a small city in central China. My first language is the major dialect spoken in the Hubei Province. However, linguistically this dialect is not a distinct one due to its closeness and similarity to the official language in China—Mandarin. The reason behind this is that Hubei Province is located in the center of China by the middle and lower reaches of Yangtze River. Being the pivot of transportation between the North and South China, it has a mixture of population from various parts of China. Therefore, the dialect in this area has developed itself into one that is easily understood by most of the people. Brought up in this particular area, I gradually acquired a certain perspective which motivated me to broaden my knowledge and vision by going to a more culturally diversified environment. This perspective led to my decision to go to college in Shanghai. During the four years of living and studying at Shanghai International Studies University, I indeed acquired substantial language skills and had more opportunities to get to know people from all over the world. As an international city, Shanghai undoubtedly contributed tremendously to both of my language and culture studies. It was the first time that I got to talk to a native English speaker after six years of English learning from middle school and high school back in Hubei Province.

Tracing my language studying experience back, I started to learn English from the first year of middle school (equivalent to 7th grade in the US education system) because it was a mandatory course as Chinese and Math. The six years of intensive English study—mainly focused on reading and writing, did not prepare me for interpersonal communication in English. This phenomenon is abnormal in theory yet common in China. According to Cummins (1984), second language learners achieve BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) within 2 or 3 years of language study. But the result-oriented teaching methods that the vast majority of Chinese school used had not help students achieve this goal. Even though I went to Shanghai later for my college and got to have the opportunity to improve my oral English with native speakers, I found it not enough to achieve my goal. In college, I received intensive training of English reading, writing, listening and speaking; however, it was very difficult for me to carry a smooth conversation with a native speaker. I found it very ironic after all these years of hard work of English study.

The motivation to improve my English proficiency and seek a more effective ways of learning a second language had led me to apply for the master’s program in Curriculum and Instruction in George Mason University. The very different methods and approaches that I have observed and learned during my coursework and internship in US public schools have expanded my vision and introduced me to a totally different approach. After I finish my second half of internship this semester, I will apply for the Virginia’s teacher license (Chinese PreK-12). All in all, there are three main factors that have contributed to me as a foreign language curriculum developer: the sufficient language learning experience both in China and the US; the methods courses and researches I have studied in my graduate program; my internship in a US school district of good quality of education.

*Philosophy of Teaching—Xiao Wu*

In my opinion, teaching is a profession that serves as a model and guide to students. There’s an old saying in China that it’s much better to teach one how to fish than just giving him the fish. I think teacher’s guidance is the fishing skills that should be focused on during my teaching. As a language teacher, I will not only tell students what the language is, but also how to learn the language well and why should we learn it that way.

The reason that I choose to teach Chinese as a foreign language is based on the simple fact that I love Chinese language and culture and that I love to teach. Chinese language and culture has one of the longest histories in the world. They are full of wisdom, passion, and beauty. I am so proud that I will share with my American students the Chinese literature, history, art, cuisine, music, festivals, philosophy and way of living. I am also willing to learn and explore with my student about the richness of Chinese language and culture, which is so tremendous that one can never learn it enough. A language teacher should not only be an expert of the language that is being taught, but also have deep affection for that language. I think it is a privilege to have Chinese as my mother tongue, and I am so willing to let the students who have little idea about it to learn Chinese and the wisdom behind it.

Culture and language are inseparable; I can never teach language without culture. A person who only holds understanding of a language but knows nothing about its culture is like a robot with mouth and ears, but neither brain nor heart. In the contrary, a person who knows a foreign culture is equipped with brain and heart, but frustratingly, no mouth or ears to communicate the simplest courtesy in the foreign language. Only with both language skills and cultural knowledge, can a person communicate as a human-being—with ears to hear, mouth to express, brain to interpret, and heart to empathize (Morain, 1986). As particularly for Chinese language, culture is such a rich topic that I can never neglect.

According to my observation, there are two main types of motivation for learning Chinese among students in K-12 schools. One is to obtain higher grades in examinations; the other is to get to know the different and unique language because of an inner interest and desire to do so. Different motivation leads to a different learning attitude and approach. But whatever their motivations are, students may feel anxiety when starting learning a new language according to Clyne (2006). The anxiety could be a result of identity conflict, language shock, and culture shock. Based on the observation above, I believe that a good teacher should strive to achieve the following objectives.

1. Create a cooperative atmosphere in order to nurture students’ interest in Chinese and love of learning. Encourage the joy of learning a new way to communicate. Too much focus on grading details may kill the joy of learning. To ease the anxiety of learning Chinese at the beginning, I will consciously speak positively of the value of learning Chinese. And I know that there’s a “silent period” (Krashen, 1981) at the beginning level of language proficiency. It is important to be more patient and keep praising the students when they show their comprehension in whatever ways.

2. Give feedback promptly in class. Since the students are surrounded by English in their daily life, the acquisition of Chinese language is mostly done in class, the teacher’s feedback and interaction to the students becomes crucial. To drawing students’ attention, Eggen (2001) states that feedback is important in terms of promoting learning and is also related to learners’ motivation. In fact, the assessment process is done in the way of giving feedback. For example, when the student answers my question, I will assess that if the student answers it well or inadequately, and then come up with the feedback such as 很好 (very good) or repeat the right answer instead of saying that the student is wrong.

3. Be clear, fair, and consistent in administrative and class management so that all students are encouraged to learn. Students can be very sensitive to fairness. They cannot learn well if they don’t trust me.

4. Make use of scaffolding and manipulatives to help students represent their potential in learning Chinese. In Vygotsky’s theory (1978), it is called ZPD. But the most important thing is that when the students realize that they have the potential to do better, they will be definitely more motivated to learn more.

5. Consider the possible needs of today’s diverse learners. I think Chinese is a tolerant and gentle language by itself. As a teacher of Chinese, I have the responsibility to convey that information in every aspect of classroom teaching. I will care about the cognitive ability and multiple intelligences of students and take into account each student’s individuality. Teaching is an art --- It takes effort and skill to "touch" people. Only when people are touched, do they have the motivation to learn willingly and effectively. My way of touching is to get to know the students’ backgrounds and care about their physical and emotional needs in learning.

Therefore, the goal that I set for myself and my students cannot be separated, because they’re interdependent. I recognize clearly the impact of a teacher on students. I would like therefore to constantly share many of my ideas and visions with students within or without the classroom. I firmly believe in the influence of a good teacher on his/her students, not only academically but also characteristically. The relationship between a teacher and a student in the class shouldn’t be distant. I will care about my students so much that I would prefer to be called their “preacher” than their “teacher”. It would not take us too much effort to direct a student into a positive thinking. Seeing a student going in the positive way is rewarding itself. In helping the students reach the standards of learning a foreign language, the most important thing for them is the communication and understanding of different languages and culture.

*Self-introduction—Weirong Wang*

I am now a graduate student of George Mason University who is majoring in Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education and Human Development. I gained my bachelor's degree at Beijing Foreign Studies University where my major was Teaching Chinese as a second language in China. Back to the college years, I learned pertinent theories about pedagogy, psychology, Chinese literature and contemporary situation and trends of Teaching Chinese as a Second/Foreign Language. At that time, I also had opportunities to tutor students from all over the world. Before graduation, I spent a four-week internship teaching in real classroom where students come from various backgrounds (e.g. ethnicity, sex, nationality, etc.) The learning environment was teacher-centered, so I just poured out what I knew about the Chinese language. When I got a chance to come to the U.S to learn to be a foreign language teacher using another perspective, I found out about other teaching concepts, and what is most important to me is that the role of teacher changes. The teacher is no longer the authority and the only active person in classroom. On the contrary, the teacher needs to teach according to students' needs. In addition, there are also standards for foreign language teachers to follow which means I have a framework to design my curriculum. Combining students' needs and standards together, I need to figure out what they need to learn and how I can achieve my goal in every class. Another thing I learned from my learning and teaching experience in U.S. is the importance of multicultrual education. There are people from all over the world in America with various backgrounds which might be totally different from my own culture. Even though I taught students from different countries, I was not aware of the difference. This really boards my vision that open to different culture and respecting all the culture is of necessity in a multicultrual environment. What's more, special education in a regular class is another phenomenon I have not seen before. All these factors I need to consider when designing my curriculum.

*Philosophy of Teaching—Weirong Wang*

My teaching philosophy contains my attitude toward both teaching and learning.

Teaching

Henderson stated that no person is born with the self which he becomes fantastically predetermined (Henderson, 1964), it is self development that makes man differ from other animals, as said by a sociologist “we are met and answered, opposed and blamed, praised and encouraged” (Ellsworth Faris, The Nature of Human Nature, p7). Based on these findings, my own theory is as follows: although a child has great potential multiple intelligences, he/she is like a white paper. The education of environment carves him along with his growth and forms his behavior. The influence might be family, school, peers, etc. I do believe that peers take a very important role during a child’s growth because kids like to imitate others’ behavior. The specific example is that when twins are apart in very different environment, they may develop extremely opposite characteristic. However, at the early ages of a child, he/she barely has any friend or friends are similar simple and naive. Therefore, I consider the role of parents and teachers who take kid’s first steps in life really important. If a child does not learn well, that is probably fault of teacher and parents.

As a teacher, I always ask myself several questions: what makes me qualified to give classes to students? Does that degree prove everything? What I am going to do in the class? It seems that the “nature” approach to teaching is to stand or sit in front of the students, to tell them what we know about they are supposed to learn, and answer any questions related to the lesson and give them a test(Schrag,1995) as my teachers do day by day. Is all my responsibility to finish my teaching task? I am a language tool teaching, do I have to know every student in my class? Shall I do some easy work like giving students some reading or playing a video while I have my own stuff to do? What shall I do when I face some difficulties in class management? All these questions test my attitude toward teaching and also my sense of responsibility. Personally, I want to be a good teacher as possible as I can. First of all, as a language teacher for K-12 students, I need to know some theories of language cognition. For example, Vygotsky’s (1978) viewpoints, Bake’s (2006) bilingual theory and also psychology theories about youth students are foundational knowledge I need to know. Secondly, I certainly need have a sense about boys and girls---their interest, their growth, their homes and their surroundings; I need to establish a healthy relationship with students is the important thing to me, once students and I trust each other, it’s much easier to solve all problems; at the same time, I need to still keep authority which is important to class management; to remind myself to settle a good example for students in case I give students bad impact; to be fair even if someone needs special care; to make the class more effective using different teaching method like using technology to create some interesting games and with different forms of activities to make them learn knowledge in an easy way…In spite of what I should do, I still need to avoid something that I should not do. For example, I am now teaching in a public elementary school with the students from K-5 and I once shouted to them to make them quiet. To my surprise, they are not frightened at all but follow me to shout. What’s worse, after that the class is almost a mess. Maybe it is not a big problem, but a teacher who wants to get some achievements had better care about anything can be improved. Last but not the least, as a new teacher, I may often face many difficulties as boys are playing and girls are talking in the classroom, what shall I do then? I can have spent the rest of the year frustrated by my students. I can have endlessly analyzed why they had no social skills, dwelling on their low socioeconomic backgrounds. Or I learn to accept my students and find ways to make progress (Hall, 2003). If I want to do something to change the situation, the only way is the last choice.

Learning

As a teacher, I also have to consider what learning means to me. My concept of learning will determine my expectation for myself and my students. Teaching and learning are two sides of the coin. As I want to serve students and make them learn happily and effectively, my class will be students-centered. Sometimes I can try to put myself in students’ positions to evaluate myself if I achieve students’ expectation. Over two thousand year ago, Confucius said teaching and learning promotes each other which implies when I know more about learning, it helps with my teaching, too. So I also need to learn how they learn and keep pace with changes and have interaction with them. As time goes by, we may establish a joyful, effective and satisfactory learning community to reach the maxim of personal development as well as passing heritage. A language teacher also has the responsibility to teach heritage and culture of the country. On the other side, I still need to learn more through teaching in class (reality is different imagination) and improve myself with lifelong learning.

*Self-introduction—Peng Yu*

I was born and raised in a medium-sized northern city named Cangzhou in Hebei province in China in the early 1980s. My first language was a northern local dialect in Huabei area. Mandarin has been my only language both at school and at home since 8th grade. Before that I spoke my dialect at home and Mandarin at school. It is very interesting that I found myself not being able to speak my local dialect any more after high school even though I was surrounded by the dialect when I stayed at home in summer or winter holidays.

In the early 1990s English (as a foreign language or EFL) was not taught nation-wide in elementary schools in China when I had elementary education. Not until middle school (7th grade) did my peers and I attend EFL classes. In the meanwhile, I studied all the other subjects including Mathematics, Chinese, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, Geography, Civics, etc. From middle school all the way through university I received 10 years of EFL education, 3 years in middle school, 3 years in high school, and 4 years in college. That was because I chose English language as my major in university. In 2006 I finished a 4-year university education and got a B.A. degree in Tianjin (next to Beijing) in China. During college days I received intensive training on every aspect of English language—phonetics, listening, speaking, reading, writing, literature, translating, etc. In addition, the university also provided other courses, like basic computer skills, college Chinese for language and social science majors, and so forth.

In January 2008 I joined the College of Education and Human Development of George Mason University to pursue my Master's degree. My program is called Chinese Language Licensure Program. Basically, after one and a half years study (including one-semester student teaching internship), I could apply for a Virginia's teacher license with the endorsement of teaching PreK-12 Chinese as a second/foreign language. With 12 more credits, I could achieve a M.Ed. degree. Last semester I finished my student teaching internship and was granted the Virginia’s teacher license (Collegiate Professional License –Chinese PreK-12) in the summer.

Between graduation from university and attending the Master’s program in the United States, I had a full-time teaching job as an English teacher/tutor in a private English language training school in Tianjin where I met students of various age groups—elementary, high school, college students, professionals, retired adult learners who had very diverse needs, learning styles, and very different expectations. This English language training school provided a whole set of well-developed level specific learning courseware and assisting classes to students at different proficiency levels. During the fall semester 2007 I also taught a college level comprehensive EFL course part-timely at a community college in Tianjin. Basically, the teaching and learning were strictly based on a department required textbook and exercise book. These were basically my education and teaching experiences before I began my Master’s study.

*Philosophy of Teaching—Peng Yu*

A language learner cannot learn a language without learning the culture, because through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998). My K-12 students should be able to learn some Chinese cultures when they are learning Chinese language in the classroom. In effect, students cannot avoid learning cultural background when they learn Chinese idioms or Chinese ancient poems which are essential components of the Chinese language and literature.

I was an English language learner when I was in China, and I witnessed the accomplishments of language education in my society. A large proportion of six-year English education receivers, mostly high school students and college juniors, could not actually speak the language (Cummins, 1984). They do not achieve the so-called Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) after a long period of language education. Once I had an opportunity to observe and record an English listening and speaking interview of graduate school candidates. They majored in engineering and they had received more than eight years of EFL education. More than 50% of them could not understand interviewer’s questions; over 60% could not answer questions in full sentences; 80% could not answer questions in correct sentences. I really do not want to see this happen to my language students. According to Cummins (1984), second language learners achieve BICS within 2 or 3 years of language study. My students should achieve this goal.

A significant body of research indicates, “Academic achievement and student behavior are influenced by the quality of the teacher and student relationship” (Jones, 1981). Therefore, it is very important to build a good teacher-student relationship. My students and I should have mutual respect with each other. I expect their respect; I should show my respect to them in my classroom.

The goal of my language classroom is to accommodate students’ diversity by identifying their individual physical and psychological needs, their multiple-intelligences, their learning styles, etc. Students connect better in their learning when their readiness level, interests, and/or learning profiles have been respected and valued (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). The classrooms I had attended when I received education were mostly teacher-centered. It made me feel very passive and not engaged in the learning process. As a student, I did not want to learn like that. Therefore, I know if I become a teacher, my students do not want to learn in that way, either. Students in my classroom will know that they play an important role in the language learning process. Recently I have done student teaching in both elementary and high schools. It is noticed that young learners are really into interactive and hands-on activities. They learn by touching, by moving, by singing. Appropriate rewarding could motivate students a lot and arouse their great interests. High school students would learn better if the knowledge and skills are actually connected and related to their everyday life.

Another important finding is that students of 21st century would love to learn with the assistance of technology. Even though first graders do not know what PowerPoint is or what Smart Board is, they just become accustomed to a classroom equipped with such kind of hi-tech utilities. Projectors, computers, and internet are becoming an essential part of language learning. It requires teachers of 21st century to be familiar with these technologies. Students of this new generation are no longer learning in the same way as we teachers learned.

To be a language teacher in the 21st century means to be updated with the fast development of modern language and technology. To achieve this, I should become an active learner in my lifetime. I need to keep myself informed of recent educational research findings as well as up-to-date Chinese language and culture development.

To learn from my peers is also a good way of professional development. They could be very supportive. They could bring me new insights and brilliant ideas. Building a solid peer cooperation network could improve sharing of teaching resources. They could always provide me with insightful suggestions and recommendations.

*School and Community*

George C. Marshall High School serves a cosmopolitan area of Fairfax County, twelve miles west of the nation’s capital. Marshall High School prides itself on its strong academic programs. Over one hundred faculty members offer a comprehensive curriculum that stresses academic courses as well as studies in fine arts and technical fields. Since 1997, Marshall has offered both the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma and individual courses for IB Certificates. Over this period, the diploma achievement rate has been 94%. Marshall’s comparatively modest size allows numerous opportunities for students to participate and develop leadership skills in a comprehensive extracurricular program.

Marshall High School prepares students to be successful citizens of the global community by providing an intellectually challenging curriculum for all students and by modeling and teaching the ethical values of respect, responsibility, honesty, spirit, and community. Marshall community communicates by exchanging information, ideas, and viewpoints among students, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and other members of the community to improve student achievement and build public support. This strong partnership among the members of the Marshall community helps students realize their educational, personal, and career goals.

Marshall Academy, a "school within a school", offers a variety of highly specialized and technical elective courses to high school students in Fairfax County Public Schools. Many courses offer industry-recognized certifications and licensure opportunities. Students may select from such courses as A+ Computer Technology, Advanced Business Management, Aerospace Science, Automotive Collision Services, Automotive Servicing, Automotive Technology, Chinese, Cosmetology, Criminal Justice, Culinary Arts, Engineering Physics, Engineering Systems, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality Management, Network Administration, and Physics of Technology. Many courses are bolstered through dynamic business partnerships with such companies as Acacia Federal Savings Bank, Booz Allen Hamilton, Cisco Systems, Microsoft, KidzOnline, CompTia, Sheraton Hotels, Marriott Hotels, Ritz Carlton Tysons Corner, and Ford Motor Company. In addition, scholarship opportunities and internship experiences are available. Most academy programs are articulated with local colleges and universities. All classes are a year long and emphasize career experiences. Academy students come from schools all over the county to take one or two specific classes and return to their base schools for the standard course offerings. For the 2009-2010 school year, over 750 students has enrolled in the academy programs from 12 high schools.

*Demographic Data*

Last school year Marshall High saw an enrollment of total 1471 students with 49.21% female students and 50.79% male students. Marshall’s students are a reflection of the great ethnic diversity in Northern Virginia. The major student body is White (almost 54%). This school has a comparatively large group of Asian or Pacific Islander students, about 21%. Hispanic origin is nearly 14%. African American and other take the remaining 11%.

The class that this project concentrated on is a Chinese Level II class with a total of 24 students. The Chinese course belongs to the Marshall Academy program. Therefore, the students enrolled in this class are from 8 schools in Fairfax County. One interesting phenomenon is that there are only two ethnic groups in this class, 9 White students and 15 Asian students. The majority of the Asian group is Chinese heritage; a few are Korean origin. There is no Hispanics or African Americans. This class meets every other day to have a 90-minute intensive language lesson. However, students from other schools could only share about 60 minutes with their Marshall peers due to the tight school bus schedule, which is an unavoidable challenge for the teacher.

*Assessment and Data Analysis*

Figure 1. Oral Assessment

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Task completion | Comprehensibility | Fluency | Pronunciation | Vocabulary | Language Control |
| Ethan | 4 | 4 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4 | 4 |
| Jaeheon | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2.5 | 3 | 2.5 |
| Wendy | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4 |
| Winter | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

Raw Score Converted % Score

Ethan: 23 97.8%

Jaeheoh: 17 84.8%

Wendy: 23 97.8%

Winter: 24 100%

Excerpt from rubric:

Meets Expectation 84%--93%

Task Completion: Completion of the task; responses appropriate and adequately developed

Comprehensibility: Responses comprehensible; requiring minimal interpretation on the part of the listener

Fluency: Some hesitation but manage to continue and complete thoughts

Pronunciation: Does not interfere with communication

Vocabulary: Adequate and accurate use of vocabulary for this level

Language Control: Emerging control of basic language control

Exceeds Expectation 93.5%--100%

Task Completion: Superior completion of the task; responses appropriate and with elaboration

Comprehensibility: Responses readily comprehensible, requiring no interpretation on the part of the listener

Fluency: Speech continuous with few pauses or stumbling

Vocabulary: Rich use of vocabulary

Language Control: Control of basic language structures

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Task Completion | Comprehensibility | Level of Discourse | Language Control | Mechanics | Vocabulary |
| Ethan | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| Jeaheon | 3 | 3 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 2.5 |
| Wendy | 4 | 4 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| Winter | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3.5 | 4 | 4 |

Figure 2. Written Assessment

Raw Score Converted %Score

Ethan: 21.5 94.6%

Jaeheoh: 17 84.8%

Wendy: 22 95.7%

Winter: 23.5 98.9%

Excerpt from rubric:

Meets Expectation 84%--93%

Task Completion: Completion of the task; content of the task; ideas adequately developed

Comprehensibility: Text comprehensible, requiring minimal interpretation on the part of the reader

Level of Discourse: Emerging variety of complete sentences; some cohesive devices

Vocabulary: Adequate and accurate use of vocabulary for this level

Language Control: Emerging control of basic language structure

Mechanics: Mostly accurate spelling, use of diacritical marks, punctuation, and/or capitalization

Exceeds Expectation 93.5%--100%

Task Completion: Superior completion of the task; content appropriate; ideas well developed and well organized

Comprehensibility: Text readily comprehensible, requiring no interpretation on the part of the reader

Level of discourse: Variety of complete sentences; some cohesive devices

Vocabulary: Rich use of vocabulary

Language Control: Control of basic language structure

Mechanics: Few or no errors in spelling, use of diacritical marks, punctuation, and/or capitalization

We used FCPS (Fairfax County Public Schools) general standardized assessment which is called PALS (Performance Assessment for Language Students) to assess students’ language proficiency. It took them thirty minutes to accomplish the test. As we can clearly see that all four students meets expectation in the exam. A written analysis for each student is provided as follows: (Anonyms are used to protect participants’ confidentiality.)

*Ethan:* Ethan’s oral Chinese is pretty good as a level two student. He can finish all the questions within time in an appropriate way with readiness comprehensibility. In addition, different words and basic language structures are used. However, Ethan has an accent probably inheriting from his parents which does not interfere with communication and he also stops for a few times to think about the answers. His Chinese writing is obviously not as good as his speaking. The passage is not well developed and organized even though he finishes it very quickly. For some sentences, they are not really in appropriate structures; however, he uses a variety of complete sentences. He also has problems in punctuation and uses limited vocabulary. In conclusion, Ethan’s oral Chinese is way better than his written Chinese.

*Jeaheoh:* I can tell Jeaheoh is not serious about studying Chinese (maybe because he is not from China and lacks of Chinese practicing environment). He can complete 80% of the task with speaking and writing. He expresses himself with hesitation from time to time. He also showed his unsatisfaction about leaning this foreign language. He uses several structures in both his writing and speaking. He answers questions simply even though most of them are right. I have difficulty understanding his composition sometimes. He uses English thinking and often tries to translate. He has several run-on sentences, spelling errors and fragments. He has difficulty in both speaking and writing Chinese. However, he still meets the expectation on the whole which shows his great potential learning Chinese who just needs motivation.

*Wendy:* Wendy has an outstanding ability of Chinese speaking except for flaw in pronunciation and fluency mainly because she is from a Cantonese family. She can organize sentence structure and pick wording perfectly and it is very comfortable to talk with her. However, her writing is not as perfect as her speaking since writing is always more complicated. Her writing is well organized and developed and not difficult to understand even though her expressions sometimes cause misunderstanding and her wording is not that authentic. Moreover, she also makes mistakes in mechanics. Another phenomenon is she gets nervous during the assessment while other three boys feel comfortable with the test. She probably lacks confidence.

*Winter:* It is really like we are talking to our friends when we assess Winter. He is perfect in speaking. And we see composition of our young age when we see his essay. Everything seems perfect except some tiny problems with language structure which sometimes is difficult for us, too. We consider him as a native speaker at this point.

The common thing is that every student gets higher score in speaking than in writing no matter how good s/he is at Chinese.

*Interviews with other Teachers*

Since the students who chose Chinese classes are from different high schools in the county, it was not feasible to contact each student’s counselor in his/her school. However, Xiao’s cooperating teacher Ms. Fu has generously shared with us the related information she had regarding the specific students we are analyzing and the whole class in general. We also consulted another Chinese teacher in Marshall Academy, Ms. Lei, since one of the students was transferred from her Chinese Level 3 class. We found it very helpful and interesting to examine the students’ performance based on their teachers’ perspective.

*Ethan:* As a heritage speaker, he did a pretty good job in the PALS. Ethan is the student who transferred from Ms. Lei’s Chinese 3 class to Ms. Fu’s Chinese 2 class. The reason for this is that, as Ms. Lei stated, his couldn’t keep up with the high demand of writing tasks and vocabulary in Chinese 3 class. He was just not ready yet for Level 3. We couldn’t help thinking that why a Chinese heritage speaker, after all these years of influence by Chinese, couldn’t catch up with Level 3 writing standards. After observations in class and his teachers’ explanations, we think there are two main factors. First, knowing how to communicate orally in Chinese with other people fluently does not equal high level of language proficiency. Even though Ethan uses Chinese at home, but it only practices simple daily-life communication. This explains why he tends to confuse different characters with same pronunciation in his writing piece. Second, he is very shy and quiet in class. He always works by himself, tries to finish everything fast and asks very few questions. Even in the area of speaking, he seems reluctant to practice with his partner in class when teacher asks him to. This is and will be an obstacle for him because language learning requires large amount of practice, trial and error, and communication with classmates and teacher.

*Jaeheon:* He is an active but often absent-minded student in class. It is the second year that he is in Ms. Fu’s class. According to Ms. Fu, he could have done much better if he pays more attention in class. The lack of motivation has been a major problem for him. Ms. Fu said Jaeheon chose Chinese just because his parent wanted him to. He is often reluctant to complete the task that teacher gives him. He chats with classmates around him a lot and is very careless in his homework or class work. In rare occasions, he tries to do extra work to earn extra credits, which indicates that his attitude towards learning Chinese is becoming positive. Research shows that language learning for useful purposes is driven by instrumental motivation, which has an extremely positive effect on learning (Baker, 2006). Therefore, we need to make more efforts on how to motivate students to a language that is generally considered difficult.

*Wendy and Winter:* There are similarities and differences between the two students. Wendy is a heritage speaker who comes from a Cantonese family. She is considered one of the top students in this Chinese class. She is in her freshman year. Winter is also a heritage speaker of Mandarin who is also an advanced student in this class. He is fluent in both oral and written Chinese. He is a junior in Mclean High School. The differences between the two has led to the following: Wendy’s language background (Cantonese) causes her lack of confidence in using Mandarin because these two languages are very different in spite of certain commonalities; in contrast, Winter feels more comfortable hence confident in using Mandarin than Wendy because of his language background.

*Home and Community Data*

As stated above, it is not possible for us to conduct home visits to students from different schools all over the county. However, we managed to conduct a survey regarding their home and community environment (See Appendix). Having an understanding of a student’s funds of knowledge, or the abilities and experiences he or she brings to my classroom, not only informs my instruction, but it also creates foundations upon which students can build greater learning and comprehensive experiences (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992). In the survey, we found that Chinese is a second even third language for most of our students who do not use it at home or do not have the opportunity to use it at home and in their community. Our students are surrounded by English environment (school, media, community), which is reasonable because they live in an English speaking society. What surprises us is that even the students with some Chinese background do not use the language at home often. For students like Jaeheon who speaks a language (Korean) other than Chinese and English at home, the opportunity to practice Chinese is even less. Even for students like Wendy and Ethan who use both Chinese and English to communicate at home, they have less time devoted to written Chinese. This is another reason why even heritage speaker have more difficulties in written Chinese than oral Chinese.

The fact that the families and students chose Chinese in spite of the difficulties of the language and the schedule issues among different schools indicates that the families that our students are from are relatively open-minded and of certain socio-economic status. All the students have access to Blackboard and provided the best condition available in their family. Therefore, our job is to motivate them through creating a more effective learning environment in our class.

*Implications*

There is one thing we always put in our minds that curriculum design should meet needs of different students in class. As we have national, state and local standards to guide us, we will try to build a content-based language learning environment to enhance students’ ability to use Chinese. Since students needs vary, a variety of instruments will be used. Changing and interesting topics will be provided to attract students; historical related theme will be introduced to enhance students desire of learning an old country; cultural materials help students learn how people live on the other side of the world; games and role play help students “learning by doing” (Wong, 2006); frequently used words are applied with meaningful illustrations and notes (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Cooperative activities are advocated to reinforce a friendly learning community in high school environment. Enhancing self and peer review in writing is a good way to improve writing. All these points have one same goal: to make learning meaningful and interesting and meet both standards and students needs.

In our curriculum unit we plan to not only incorporate differentiated materials but also to engage these students in cooperative learning experiences that will encourage them to participate in the class discussions. As Peregoy and Boyle (2005) indicate, working in a cooperative setting will support the four students’ language needs, because they will have a specific role in a small group of diverse learners.

**APPENDIX**

**NEEDS ANALYSIS SURVEY**

Name: Gender: Grade:

This survey is for research purpose only. Your information will not be revealed to any other person or organization.

1. How many people are there in your family? Who are they?
2. What language(s) do you speak at home?
3. What books, magazines or newspapers do you usually read? In what language?
4. What TV programs or movies do you watch? In what language?
5. Do you like your community? Why or why not?
6. Are there many activities held by your community?
7. What countries are your parents originally from?
8. What countries are your neighbors originally from?

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